WALL STREET JOURNAL
12 March 1986

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 34

Harvard's Point of Order

By Mark Helprin

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—At the beginning of the McCarthy years, Carey McWilliams described the impact on the academic world several generations earlier of the so-called Lusk loyalty laws. In "Witch Hunt: The Revival of Heresy," he wrote, "An orgy of investigation and harassment took place as individuals squared away to settle personal grievances and disputes that had been accumulating for decades." Now history delights in repeating itself.

Six months ago at Harvard a storm arose, and it has been echoing quietly in the American press. My former teacher and graduate adviser, Prof. Nadav Safran, received from the Central Intelligence Agency a grant for research on Saudi Arabia that resulted in a recently published book. Prof. Safran followed to the letter Harvard's regulations, which unambiguously permit relations with the CIA, and reported properly to the appropriate authorities. The CIA then offered additional support, for a previously scheduled conference on Islamic fundamentalism. As chairman of the university's Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES), Prof. Safran informed the center's contentious executive committee, but neglected to inform the university administration.

As the conference approached, someone broke into the CMES files and removed Prof. Safran's research contract. This stolen document then appeared under a banner headline in The Harvard Crimson. Soon thereafter, the source of the conference funds was publicized and the invited scholars were informed far enough in advance of the affair for those who wanted to drop out to do so. Prof. Safran realized that he had erred in not telling the administration, and although it is clear from his discussion of the matter before his executive committee that he had not attempted to conceal anything, he apologized for his error.

Nadav Safran

Then a number of parties, each with long-fought agenda, converged to exploit the disclosure: the boys at The Crimson, playing Watergate without reflecting that *they* were profiting from a burglary; the grown-up press, settling scores with the CIA; Prof. Safran's frenzied colleagues, maneuvering in self-promotion or to fight the Arab-Israeli conflict; and polite Boston society, at dinner parties, seething with indignation and titillated by the license to abhor.

In the great newspapers of the nation one could read that Prof. Safran had exposed all academics in the field "to the suspicion that they were spies and saboteurs," that he had committed "an almost obscene violation of academic ethics," that "people's lives could be at stake," that his actions had "cast a pall over the results of scholarship," "provided new ammunition for anti-Americanism among Middle Eastern intellectuals," and made it "harder for people outside the government to interract with those in it in a legitimate, respectable way." All this, mind you, while "undercutting the moral foundations of the university," and "secretly propagandizing the American people."

Preeminent in this display of wacko journalism was the Boston Globe, which not only drew attention to baseless "reports widely discussed in the Middle East that (Safran) has been an agent for Mossad," Israel's foreign-intelligence unit, but suggested that he had actually been the head of the Israeli domestic secret services (when he was hardly out of his teens). Always the Ethel Merman of newspapers, the Globe belted out its song in wild tangents that, when they were finished defaming Prof. Safran, became strangely reminiscent (syntactically, at least) of Mao Tse-tung: e.g. "To think freely . . . means being free of service to the state," a motto not likely to be found on the crests of the framers of the Constitution, Leonardo da Vinci or Johann Sebastian Bach.

Sadly enough, Prof. Safran's colleagues did no better than the press. They seemed to believe that they were suddenly in physical danger. "People's lives could be at stake," said Andrew Hess of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts. He was joined by Richard Frye of Harvard, who asserted that, "People in the field now have to worry about their lives," and by Richard Wilson, chairman of Harvard's physics department, who, on canceling his travel plans, declared, "I don't want to go any place until it's perfectly clear that I'm not associated with the CIA." (You may go now, Prof. Wilson. All is clear.)

Numerous Harvard professors and other academics thus indicated that they were willing to allow foreign terrorists to dictate the pattern of association among American scholars. That is not to say that they did not have their own objections. A former director of the CMES maintained that Prof. Safran's grants from the CIA "make us an arm of the U.S. government," while one of his colleagues casually compared Prof. Safran to Mussolini. Of scholars who accept consultancies with the CIA, Dr. John Mack of the Harvard Medical School stated that "their freedom to think has been bought." He did not give his opinion of National Institutes of Health grants. But Louis Dupree, visiting professor at Duke, best expressed the arrogance of a closed world when he told The Crimson that, yes, he would attend the controversial conference because, "I'd like to educate the sons of bitches. If it's sponsored by the analyst [sic] branch of the CIA, I'd like to educate the spooks."

The climate in which these bilious and often pathetic defamations unfurled was not accidental, for there was a wind that drove the little waves. During the pause when the press had gotten its teeth into Prof. Safran and was breathing quietly through its nose, the new dean of arts and sciences at Harvard, A. Michael Spence, indicated that the professor would not be disciplined for his technical infraction, and that since the conference participants (and everyone else in the world) now knew who was footing the bill, the gathering would proceed as scheduled. Next in the recorded sequence, however, John Shattuck, the university's vice president for public affairs, upstaged the dean, stating that "all aspects of this matter" would be investigated. A week after Dean Spence had characterized the research contract as "not of formal concern," Mr. Shattuck was calling it "absolutely out of the question."

In the person of Dean Spence, Harvard then began an investigation that cannot be characterized as anything but an academic Star Chamber. Although Mr. Shattuck claims that it was confined to the research contract and the conference, it broadened into a generalized inquisition with no particular focus, touching now upon allegations of financial mismanagement, upon allegations of favoritism, upon allegations that bookshelves built for Prof. Safran's office should have been paid for by the CIA but were illicitly constructed using university funds. There was little restraint in soliciting anonymous accusations—many, presumably, from the same disaffected staff who were unburdening themselves to various newspaper reporters.

The "investigation" continued for three months, drawing its procedures from the pages of Arthur Koestler. Late one evening, for example, Prof. Safran was given a 30-page document to which he was obliged to respond the next day. Though it may have been delivered by Koestler, it was written by Kafka. It concluded, *inter alia*, that Prof. Safran was to be charged for both the purchase and rental of the same word processor, and it considered the deep question of whether a secretary had seen a document upon which she had made a note in her own hand. The "find-

Continued

2.

ings" were leaked to the newspapers, which apparently stimulated the anonymous accusers, and thus the investigators, and thus the leakers, truly ad nauseam.

In the face of social ostracism, a hysterical campaign in the press and a rogue inquisition, most people would have wilted, but Prof. Safran, a veteran of hot war and a master of patient detail, persevered in his own defense until he was cleared of all charges except that of failing to notify the right office of the conference funding. On this point of order he was finally forced to resign as director of the CMES.

Although Mr. Shattuck, who was the director of the American Civil Liberties Union before taking his Harvard post, states that "I have every reason to believe that the investigation was thorough and that it was fair," what exactly is an inquiry that is based on stolen private papers, that respects no confines, that observes no protective procedures, that exists symbiotically with trial in the press, that feeds on allegations from unnamed witnesses, that affords no opportunity for cross-examination, and that is thorough and unmerciful in its defamation of character?

Using Openness as a Scourge

If one listens to the participants in this affair who have been fulsome in the press, one might conclude that the issue centers on disclosure, and that the CIA is welcome as long as it is properly registered. In view of the fact that a separate set of university regulations exists for the CIA, and that professors are not held feet-to-the-fire if they neglect to report their Guggenheims, this rings terribly false. And even if the CIA were not singled out for special treatment, the momentary bias for openness is purely arbitrary. Is not privacy, at the other end of the spectrum, just as important in preserving academic freedom?

Were the academy always benign, privacy probably would not be a value central to its preservation. But as the investigations of the '50s and the excesses of the '60s show, free thought sometimes needs shelter from the pressures of conformity. At Harvard they are speaking gently of openness, and they are using it as a scourge.

The climate of betrayal and denunciation has developed its own momentum. Now, professor of government Samuel Huntington is under fire for his relations with the CIA, and if someone does not put a stop to all this, others, too, will be denounced by anonymous accusers. For what? For dealing privately with a legally constituted branch of their own democratically elected government.

Perhaps this is the time to cite to those who have capitalized on the persecution of an honest man these words of Joseph Welch to Sen. McCarthy, in June of 1954: "You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

Mr. Helprin is a novelist and political commentator living in New York.